

October 5, 1989

Contact: Cynthia S. Hanson

Cross Section: Graphic Art in Germany After the First World War

October 10, 1989 - January 7, 1990

During the 1920s and early 30s, Germany was a crossroads for an international community of avant-garde artists, writers, and musicians. The exhibition **Cross Section: Graphic Art in Germany After the First World War** gives insight into the wide array of graphic art in Germany during the brief period of peace between the two World Wars. Works on paper by nearly 50 artists from Germany, Russia, Austria, Hungary, Belgium, Switzerland, and America are presented at The Cleveland Museum of Art from October 10, 1989 through January 7, 1990.

When Germany was released from its repressive monarchy in 1918, it rapidly industrialized and experienced a renewed spirit of nationalism. This freer political climate was marked by artistic optimism and variety, and many art movements developed: Late Expressionism, Dada, Bauhaus Functionalism, Constructivism, Suprematism, and The New Objectivity. The exhibition contains about 100 prints, drawings, illustrated books, collages and photomontages from all these movements.

During this period in Germany, artists saw themselves as radical reformers. Their graphics exposed social ills, proposed utopian ideals, and advocated political views. They either condemned or celebrated the new machine-age city. Many, like Kaethe Kollwitz (German, 1867-1945), depicted the horrors of war. A portfolio of Seven Woodcuts About War by Kollwitz is part of the show.

As the political and economic conditions changed, idealism was soon replaced by cynicism. By the mid-1920s, hunger, hyper-inflation, unemployment and a growing division between the classes led artists to expose Germany's problems with harsh, often vulgar bluntness. Work by artists of The New Objectivity differed sharply from Expressionism earlier in the decade. For example, the pencil drawing Man Seated With Hat On by George Grosz (German, 1893-1959) and lithographs like Southern Sailor and Woman With Aigrette by Otto Dix (German, 1891-1961) reflect the cool, analytic approach to subject matter that some artists began to take.

The burst of creativity ended when political leaders set out to censor art. Hitler and the National Socialists gained control in the 1930s, and drove artists out of jobs. Many of their graphic works survived the Nazi regime and today serve as eloquent documents of one of the most complex and fertile periods for the arts in Germany's history.

Starr Siegele, assistant curator of Prints and Drawings, organized the exhibition of works from The Cleveland Museum of Art, supplemented with loans from the Toledo Museum of Art, The Akron Art Museum, The Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College, The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music in New York, and private sources. The exhibition is part of the Kurt Weill Festival, conceived and coordinated by the Great Lakes Theater Festival with the support of AT&T, The Cleveland Foundation, the Ohio Arts Council, Progressive Companies, WCLV Radio, and The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music.

#